

I rise today in support of H.R. 5, the Senior Citizens' Freedom to Work Act of 1999.

Social Security is our most important promise to our retired citizens. For 60 years, it has provided retirement security for millions of Americans. Unfortunately, the earnings test has long acted as a disincentive for those who wish to work by reducing their Social Security payments. Today's important legislation will eliminate the Social Security Earnings test for recipients of retirement age. It will pay for itself in ten years or less and there is no reason to oppose this long overdue reform. I have cosponsored and voted in favor of similar bills in the past and I am pleased to see it being taken up in this bipartisan manner.

A livable community is one where all members of the community are valued. By repealing the earnings test we recognize the unique contribution seniors have to give. When seniors work they are able to mentor younger workers and develop intergenerational relationships where they can share their experiences and pass on their values. The contributions and involvement of seniors is an important component of livable communities.

Thanks to advancements in medicine, people are not only living longer, but importantly they are also able to continue to be active longer. By eliminating the test we are recognizing changing lifestyles and encouraging those who wish to continue to support themselves and contribute to society.

The earnings test disproportionately favors higher income seniors. Those with benefits from pensions or savings are still able to receive full benefits while those who wish to supplement their Social Security income by working are punished. This inequality is an embarrassment in a system that is meant to serve as a retirement safety net, particularly for low income seniors. I am proud to support this bill and I hope that we will soon take up comprehensive reform to ensure that Social Security remains solvent and available to working Americans.